




Iowa Afterschool Alliance

A Guide for Afterschool Community Forums



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The Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) is a statewide coalition of networks and interest groups who support, advocate, train, and work to advance afterschool and out-of-school time experiences which are meaningful and beneficial for children, youth, families, and communities.

Vision

All Iowa children, youth, and families will have accessible, affordable, and quality out-of-school time options within their community as part of an array of expected services, activities, and programs that enhance a child's positive development, safety, and opportunities.

Partners

Community & School Based Afterschool Programs
Iowa Asset Building Coalition
Iowa Child Care & Early Education Network
Iowa Community Education Association
Iowa State Education Association
Iowa PTA
Iowa Afterschool Association
ISU Extension – 4-H Youth Development
State Child Care Advisory Council
State Public Policy Group
Youth Policy Institute of Iowa
Iowa Department of Education
Iowa Department of Human Services
Iowa Division of Criminal & Juvenile Justice Planning

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance supports policies and practices that will make high-quality sustainable afterschool programs throughout Iowa the norm – not the exception. Assuring that all Iowa children and youth have access to safe, affordable, and meaningful afterschool programming requires both public and private sector support.

© About the IAA ©

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance is a project of the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development and receives financial support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Afterschool Network grant, the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust, the Iowa Department of Education, and the Iowa Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning.

Contact Information

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Afterschool programs keep kids safe and out of trouble; help working families; and support student learning. The regular school day accounts for only about 12% of a young person's time. With adequate resources, out-of-school time programs can provide extra learning opportunities, contribute to improved student achievement, and promote overall positive youth development.

Families need and want high-quality afterschool programming. There is significant public support for programs that keep kids safe and out of trouble in the non-school hours. Polling conducted by the National Afterschool Alliance in 2003 shows that more than three-quarters of voters believe that afterschool programs are “a complete necessity” for their community. These polls also show that 77% of voters either favor or strongly favor “the federal government putting aside specific funds to be used for afterschool programs.”¹

Iowans must make a commitment to expand the availability of quality afterschool opportunities for children and youth. The Iowa Afterschool Alliance supports:

- **Maximizing existing resources** through better coordination and utilization of available funding streams and sharing of non-financial resources;
- **Increasing federal appropriations for the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program** to offset the loss of funding Iowa suffered when the program switched from competitive grants to a formula-based state allocation;

- **Building the capacity** of afterschool programs to provide high-quality, meaningful opportunities to children and youth, particularly those who are at risk of poor outcomes, including academic failure; and
- **Creating partnerships** among families, schools, school-age care providers, community and faith-based organizations, and public agencies to expand and enhance afterschool programs.

¹ Nationwide Poll of Registered Voters on Afterschool Programs, 2003

Afterschool programs keep kids safe and out of trouble.

- There are over 300,000 children ages 5 through 12 in Iowa who could benefit from afterschool programs.
- Most delinquent activity by youth occurs between the hours of three and six p.m.²
- Teens who do not participate in afterschool programs are three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs, and they are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and engage in sexual activity.³

Afterschool programs help working families.

- Iowa has the greatest percentage of families in the nation with both (or the only) parent working.⁴
- Even if an afterschool program is available, many working families cannot afford the cost of a high-quality program.

Afterschool programs support student learning.

- High-quality, school-linked afterschool programs are a proven method for improving academic achievement, decreasing grade retention, and increasing student attendance and interest in school.⁵
- Experiential and non-traditional educational opportunities during the non-school hours can be used to enhance and extend classroom learning.
- Teens who do not participate in afterschool programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes at school than teens who do participate.⁶

² Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Statistical Briefing Book

³ After School for America's Teens, YMCA of the USA, 2001

⁴ Children's Defense Fund, 2003

⁵ Harvard Family Research Project, "A Review of Out-of-School Time Program Quasi-Experimental and Experimental Evaluation Results," 2003

⁶ After School for America's Teens, YMCA of the USA, 2001

© Purpose of the Community Forums ©

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance community forums are designed to raise awareness about the importance of afterschool and to develop and support partnerships across Iowa. The intent of holding these forums is to bring together partners who are interested in afterschool issues and to begin ongoing communication throughout the state in order to promote the importance of afterschool programs. Although these forums are a one-time event, each community is encouraged to continue conversations and to promote afterschool at the local level.

Purpose of Community Forums:

1. To raise awareness of the importance of afterschool and to encourage discussions across the state.

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance is working to develop and communicate a common afterschool vision and message that can be shared by diverse perspectives represented across the state. Our communications strategy involves increasing recognition and building legitimacy of the Alliance and promoting awareness and understanding of the value and importance of quality afterschool programs. The community forums are just one avenue for holding afterschool discussions.

2. To develop and support partnerships across Iowa.

One of the goals of the Iowa Afterschool Alliance is to foster statewide, regional, and local partnerships (particularly school-community partnerships) at all levels. This includes expanding outreach and recruitment efforts and establishing and maintaining regular communication across Iowa related to afterschool issues. The afterschool partnerships that are developed and supported at the local level will help foster ongoing communication at the state and national level.

© Purpose of the Community Forums ©

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance is available to support and assist these partnerships in the following ways:

- Help plan and facilitate the community forums
- Provide information, materials, and resources to communities
- Regularly communicate policies and practices related to afterschool
- Coordinate and extend training and technical assistance opportunities

Upon completion of the community forums, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance will host an Afterschool Summit in 2005. This Summit will bring together communities from across the state who will have an opportunity to share their experiences and develop strategies for continuing to promote afterschool and maintain partnerships.

©Planning a Successful Forum ©

1. Assemble a team of energetic people you can count on to plan and execute your community forum.
2. Select a facilitator, a date, a time, and a location for your community forum. A good forum should last about 1½ hours, and certainly no more than 2 hours. Choose a time of day when your invitees are most likely to be able to attend, such as 5:30-7:00pm or 7:00-8:30pm (to avoid intruding on people's dinner time). It works well to allow the facilitator to choose the forum location, especially if the location adds flavor to your meeting. For instance, hosting the community forum onsite at an afterschool facility puts a face on your meeting, allowing participants to experience the program—not just hear you talking about it.
3. Make sure that your location is accessible to persons with disabilities.
4. Draft a positive and brief invitation to the event. Make sure the invitation speaks to all possible audiences. See draft invitation letter.
5. Brainstorm with your team the people you want to invite and add these names to other databases you may have of parents, teachers, community leaders, legislators and others. Don't just invite "the usual suspects"—branch out and invite local businesspersons, clergy, and other people that care about kids.
6. Invite at least one key policy maker to the event.
7. Keep track of who has been invited, and follow up mailed or emailed invitations with a personal note or phone call, if possible. People are busy and they forget about events that are outside their comfort zone. Try dividing up the list amongst the team to make sure everyone gets a personal contact, as well as an invitation. This is especially important with your legislators.

Planning a Successful Forum

8. Send out invitations two to three weeks in advance. Make follow up contacts one week to a few days before your event. If desired, send out a “bump” postcard to remind invitees of the event arriving about 3 days beforehand. You may wish to send a “save the date” card a month in advance, and follow up with an invitation 2-3 weeks prior to the event.

9. Make an outline of your community forum and be sure to include at least one activity. If possible, create a strong visual theme for the event and have that theme reflected in your materials. You don’t attract media with “talking heads,” so don’t be afraid to try something unusual!

10. Send out press releases to local newspapers and other media. See draft media release. Follow up with personal phone calls.

11. Design a simple, brightly colored flyer and post it 5-10 days before your event in places where your potential audience is likely to see it. If you post a flyer too early, you run the risk of the flyer being covered by others or people forgetting about the event. See draft event flyer.

12. Make sure that your location will be unlocked and easily entered.

13. Post signs around the building to make sure people can find the forum.

14. If you wish, make light snacks and/or drinks available.

15. Before your event, relax a bit and remember why you’re putting on a community forum in the first place—to make sure kids in your community have a place to be safe, to learn, and to have fun after school!

© Tips on Getting Participation ©

Community forums are about **people in your community interacting with others** and **learning** about an issue. Engaging people as **active participants** is crucial, so we suggest a forum that centers heavily on **participation from everyone**.

- Arrange chairs and tables in a circle or a U-shape, so participants' attention will be on each other, and everyone can easily see whoever is talking.
- Provide a sign-in sheet so you can get people's contact information and know how many attended.
- Make name tags available so that the forum team can call participants by name. Greet each participant as they enter and introduce yourself. If appropriate and possible, show participants around the location and/or introduce them to others. Don't make this a one-person show! Get help from your team in making everyone feel welcome.
- Begin on time. Let participants know that you value the time they gave up to attend the event, so every effort will be made to begin and end on time.
- If you don't engage everyone your audience in the first half hour, you will have lost them for the rest of your event.

Here are some suggestions of potential activities you could use in planning a successful forum. These activities are about flexibility. Feel free to choose whichever ones you like, or to combine some with your own ideas or what has worked well in the past. Adapt the activities to fit your own program or community, and please let us know how they worked!

Introductions (10-15 min.)

Have everyone introduce themselves and say what group they represent, if any. Also, have participants briefly answer an “ice-breaker” question, such as:

- “Why did you come tonight?”
- “Why do you think afterschool programs are important?”
- “What is one way you’d like to see afterschool programs improve/expand?”

Power Point: What’s the Iowa Afterschool Alliance? (15-20 min.)

Have your facilitator or a representative from the IAA run through this short Power Point presentation. Make sure to ask questions of and/or get input from specific participants during the presentation in order to keep the energy high.

Testimonials from Kids and Parents (5-10 min.)

Have one or more afterschool kids and/or parents talk to the group about what it means to them to have afterschool programs available. You might ask parents beforehand to make a few notes so that they can keep their remarks brief and focused. Kids are more fun unscripted, but be prepared to ask questions if they need drawn out or kept on subject.

Community Solutions (20-30 min.)

Facilitate a group discussion that articulates some specific needs of afterschool programs in the area. Be sure to ask what ideas participants have to address program needs, such as asking local businesses to donate snacks or drawing paper. Keep the discussion solution-oriented. Try to identify participants who might be willing to lend their time and expertise to help solve specific problems. Don’t be afraid to ask follow-up questions like, “How do you see that working?” or “Can you give me an example of what that would look like?”

Advocating for Afterschool (20-30 min.)

The idea of “lobbying” or advocating is intimidating for most people; that’s why a short presentation on the many faces of advocacy followed by a question and answer session can be very helpful. Using the advocacy strategies template, talk about the easiest forms of advocacy first. You can ask for a show of hands of people who think any given advocacy effort is doable, but try not to put people on the spot. Acknowledge that advocacy is out of most people’s comfort zones, but ask that participants strongly consider committing to a strategy that they can see themselves feeling comfortable with.

Engaging the Community (15-25 min.)

Give participants 3-4 minutes to write down as many local groups, organizations, and individuals who they think might be interested in being involved in any way in supporting afterschool programs. Have participants get with a partner for about 5 minutes, share their lists, and brainstorm on how they might get the people on their lists interested or involved. Bring the group back together and have the pairs share a few highlights from their lists. Have one person write on a large flipchart the community members and strategies that the pairs share with the group. Offer the opportunity for participants to come up later and put their additional ideas on the list.

Letting Kids Show What They Get from Afterschool (varies)

One of the most powerful tools we have to show the importance of afterschool programs is to allow kids to demonstrate what types of things they do when they are there. For instance, ask kids in your program to come up with a funny skit about afterschool or what they might be doing without it. Have them demonstrate a game they play in their program. Have them make a display of photos taken at the program or of artwork they’ve completed there. Ask kids in your program for their ideas on what they could do to show people what goes on in their program.

Elected officials are busy people with important work to do. But...they work for you. Don't be intimidated by the hustle and bustle of the environment in which they work and don't be intimidated by them personally. It's their job to hear your concerns and to represent those concerns in the work they do.

Because the majority of funding and policy on afterschool programs occurs in Congress, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance advocacy guide speaks mainly about election officials at the federal level. However, the vast majority of this information can also be applied to advocacy efforts at the state level. Please keep the following information in mind:

- Advocacy works best when it is based upon relationships. Keep in touch with legislators on an ongoing basis—not just when you're angry with them or want something from them.
- Legislators' staff members are most often quite influential, so it is important to treat them with respect. If you are rude to a secretary or other staff member, the legislator will certainly hear about it. Likewise, staff members often remember who is very nice and obliging.
- Be sure to call your legislators by their appropriate titles. Never call a Representative, "Senator;" never call a Senator, "Representative."
- Research your legislator's previous support for afterschool. Make sure you know who you're talking to. Think of ways to link afterschool with other issues the official cares about such as education, crime prevention, or working families.

If you believe in afterschool, take action to make sure it gets the support it needs. As much as we would like to believe that afterschool programs will be funded because “it’s the right thing to do,” legislators must make tough choices about what to fund with limited resources. Your voice can help.

Ordinary citizens often make the mistake of thinking they cannot be good advocates; on the contrary, parents, teachers, and other community members tend to be much more effective in afterschool advocacy than “the experts.” Policy makers want to hear from real people with real concerns but they don’t have the time to come looking for you, so what are you waiting for?

Stuff That’s Easy to Do

- **Call your members of Congress and tell them you would like them to support afterschool programs (5 min.)**
Don’t worry. You’ll just be talking to a staff member who will write down what you say and pass it on to the legislator. The staff member won’t be quizzing you on anything—just passing on your comments and asking for your contact information. Use the talking points provided and/or write down what you want to say first. Be sure to say that you are a constituent. This is especially helpful if there is a specific piece of legislation that you are asking them to support or oppose.
- **Invite members of Congress to your afterschool event (10 min.)**
See sample invitation letter.
- **Write thank you letters to Congress (10 min.)**
Advocacy is about relationships. When members of Congress take a position that supports afterschool programs, take a few minutes and express your personal thanks to them in a phone call, letter or email. Let other advocates know and encourage them to write their own letters.

- **Check out what's going on in the National Afterschool Alliance (10 min.)**

The more you know about afterschool advocacy efforts in the state and across the nation, the more comfortable you feel taking further action.

www.afterschoolalliance.org

Stuff That Takes a Little More Time and Effort

- **Write a letter or an email to members of Congress asking them to support afterschool programs (15-30 min.)**

See sample letters to members of Congress. Be direct, persuasive and brief. Don't expect them to guess why you are writing or to read your entire life story.

Whether you are a parent or a program provider, the letter should follow a basic template:

- 1st paragraph states the reason for the letter and who you are
- 2nd paragraph gives reasons for your position and a specific illustration of those reasons
- 3rd paragraph summarizes your position and requests a specific action from them

Emails can follow the same template. Be sure to include your full contact information.

- **Start a letter writing or phone calling campaign (30 to 90 min.)**

The more letters and phone calls a member of Congress gets on an issue, the more they pay attention. Using the guidelines provided above, ask others you know who are involved in afterschool issues to join you in writing letters and making phone calls. Try hosting a letter writing party using some of the same planning guidelines as you use for a community forum. Email is also a terrific and convenient way to get out information and ask people to join you. Be sure people add their own personal approach to their phone calls and letters—form letters and highly scripted phone calls are not effective advocacy tools.

- **Attend Congressional meetings in your area (60-90 min.)**

When Congress is not in session, members of Congress generally hold a series of meetings across the state or across their district for the express purpose of talking with their constituents. These meeting location and times are generally advertised in newspapers beforehand and can also be distributed via email networks. Attend a "town meeting" and use talking points to speak with your legislator about afterschool issues. It can be very effective to ask a question that calls for action, such as "What will you do this year to ensure that afterschool programs are adequately funded in Iowa?"

Stuff That Takes a Good Deal of Time and Effort

- **Meeting with members of Congress (15-30 min. plus planning time)**

Meeting directly with members of Congress is said to be the most effective form of advocacy. Constituents may meet with members of Congress either at their state offices or in their offices in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, this may take a lot of planning as Congressional delegates' schedules may change often and with little notice. Advocates have to be willing to be flexible and to possibly meet with Congressional staff who focus on Education, rather than necessarily always the legislator.

As with other advocacy efforts, it is important to provide the legislators with accurate information, as well as a personal perspective. Groups of advocates, including parents and afterschool kids, have been highly effective. Be sure to let the legislator and his/her staff know what you'd like them to do and to leave them with more information to look at when you are gone. Follow up any meeting with a personal thank you note.